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ABSTRACT

Managerial styles and the concommitant relationships between managers and other employees can have a significant impact on many aspects of the work situation. In a study of the environments within two automotive supply organizations similar in size and technology but different in formal managerial styles (participative management and modified Scalon Plan vs. traditional unionized organization), employees' attitudes and behaviors were compared. Overall, results indicated that the rank and file employees' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors were more favorable in the organization with the more democratic formal managerial style than in the more traditional organization, but there was very little difference in the response of the supervisors between the two environments. The findings suggest that traditional unionized organizations may produce a more stressful work environment for rank and file employees, while democratic management may be more stressful for managers. (JAC)

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Managerial Styles and Employee Responses

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Managerial Styles and Employee Responses

Managerial styles, and the concommitant relationships between managers and rank-and-file employees, can have a significant impact on many aspects of the work situation, e.g., on the bargaining process, and on employee attitudes and behaviors. The objective of the present study is to compare the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of employees (both managerial and rank-and-file) working in different types of organizations. Specifically, the study focuses on whether systemic organizational properties can affect the extent to which employees experience job stress, have favorable attitudes, and exhibit withdrawal behaviors.

The early theoretical model of occupational stress developed by Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, and Rosenthal (1964) indicated that "macro" or organization-wide variables may partly determine individually perceived job stress. Similarly, organizational variables have been found to affect employee attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Berger & Cummings, 1979; Porter & Lawler, 1965; Steers & Rhodes, 1978; Talacchi, 1960). It seems likely that organizational-level variables such as size, technology, and managerial style would affect not only an employee's job, but also his/her response to the job. This is the perspective adopted in the present study.

The theme of this study was a comparison of employees' perceptions, attitudes, and behavior in two organizations that had major differences in their managerial styles. The first organization was traditional in its management philosophy and had an established union. The second organization was managed more democratically, was not unionized, and used a modified Scalon-type profit-sharing plan (the modifications usually

entailed the tailoring of the Scanlon plan to the specific organizational needs). These characteristics of the two organizations were fairly stable. That is, developmental and adaptation effects were fairly well "in place" by the time the present study was conducted.

Managerial styles and philosophies were expected to have some impact on the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of employees. At the same time, many other properties of organizations also affect these variables (Berger & Cummings, 1979). For example, the size of the organization, the technology used, the nature of the product, etc. can all have a significant impact on employees. In order to control for these effects, the present study used organizations that were relatively similar on many structure and technology dimensions. For example, both organizations employed a few hundred employees, used a mass production technology, and were engaged in the manufacture of automotive accessories. Thus, if organizational size and technology are most critical for employee responses, then the employees of the two organizations should be relatively similar in their perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors. If, however, it is managerial philosophy and unionization that are the major correlates of employee responses, then employees in the two organizations should exhibit significant differences on the variables of interest. One purpose of the study is to disentangle the effects of managerial style variables from size/technology variables on employee responses.

Another purpose of this research was to examine the extent to which managerial and rank-and-file employees differ from each other in plants exhibiting the two style differences. It can be hypothesized, for example, that a more democratic style of leadership leads to a shift in decision-making responsibilities from managerial to rank-and-file employees.

This shift could be perceived as favorable by the latter, but not by the former group of employees. Alternatively, rank-and-file employees could perceive this shift as increasing their "burden," and react negatively to it. In the absence of convincing proof of the causal dynamics, no a priori predictions are offered; it is suggested, however, that the managerial and rank-and-file employees will react differently to differences in organizational styles and philosophies.

Berger and Cummings (1979) highlighted many problems inherent in research on organi ational structure and employee attitudes and behaviors. The design of the present research addresses several of these problems. For instance, much previous research has addressed only a narrow range of dependent variables on which organizational characteristics may have an impact. By contrast, the present research focused on a cross-section of employee attitudes and behaviors. The analysis strategy, furthermore, was able to address interactions among the predictors. Another criticism of previous research raised by Berger and Cummings (1979) is that the bulk of the research has focused on attitudinal rather than behavioral differences associated with organizational differences. The present research was designed to remedy this deficiency by focusing on both employee attitudes and behaviors. In short, this research is relatively free of many of the shortcommings that have plagued past investigations.

Method

The data for the present study were collected from two midwestern organizations that manufacture automotive accessories. Organization A, employing about 400 people, used a participative management approach and had implemented a modified Scanlon-type plan. As mentioned earlier,

these modifications centered on the tailoring of the Scanlon plan to the particular dictates of Organization A. Work groups in Organization A participated in decisions concerning work methods and policies that affected their own work lives, and there was a profit-sharing bonus plan. The Scanlon plan had been implemented in this organization in the mid 50's. Thus, wrinkles inherent in the implementation of a profit-sharing plan had been smoothed out long before the inception of the present study.

Organization B employed about 600 people, and was somewhat traditional or authoritarian in its managerial philosophy, and employees belonged to a union. Authority relationships followed rigid hierarchical lines, and employees had little or no say in the conduct of their day-to-day work lives. Thus, the two organizations were similar in technology (i.e., the use of assembly lines) and size, but they were different in terms of managerial outlook. That Organization A was more participative in its management style than Organization B was confirmed by the reports of both employees and independent observers trained to rate the jobs in the two organizations. Thus, employees in Organization A rated their jobs as being significantly higher than employees in Organization B on variables such as autonomy, and freedom to make decisions, etc.; and these differences were also validated by the reports of observers.

All the supervisors and a sampling of the non-supervisors from both organizations were included in the sample. A response rate of 71.4% in Organization A yielded an analysis sample of 120; a response rate of 63.6% in Organization B yielded an analysis sample of 124. All the non-supevisory personnel in Organization B were members of the union.

An examination of the demographic characteristics of the samples from the two organizations showed them to be remarkably similar--the average age of respondents was 36 years in Organization A and 33 years in Organization B; 72% of employees from Organization A and 67% from Organization B were males; and 98% of employees from Organization A and 90% from Organization B were white. Thus, any observed differences between the two organizations cannot be attributed to differences in the demographic characteristics of the employees.

Measures

Data on three types of variables, viz., perceptual, attitudinal, and behavioral, were obtained in the present study. While the perceptual and attitudinal data were obtained through structured interviews conducted in the respondents' homes, behavioral data were obtained through a search of the companies' personnel records. The purpose of the present study was not to obtain an exhaustive listing of the dimensions along which the employees of the two organizations were different. Rather, the purpose was to assess the extent to which managerial styles were related to employee responses. Thus, a sampling of employee perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors was obtained.

Information on three perceptual variables was obtained: job ambiguity (the degree to which the respondent perceived his/her job expectations to be unclear); job overload (the degree to which the respondent perceived his/her job expectations to exceed time or skills available to him/her); and underutilization of skills and abilities (the degree to which the respondent perceived himself/herself to have skills and abilities that were not used in the job). Information on the construction and the

psychometric properties of these three measures is provided in Gupta and Beehr (1979). Three additudinal variables were also measured in the study: job involvement, a one-item measure taken from Patchen (1965); job satisfaction; and job search intent, a measure of the intention to look for a new job in the next year, also taken from Quinn and Shepard (1974). Finally, three measures of withdrawal behaviors were also used. Prior absence referred to the frequency of absences during the month preceding the interview. Subsequent absences referred to the average frequency of absences per month for the six months subsequent to the interview. Finally, voluntary turnover was a measure of whether the respondent terminated voluntarily or not during the 17 months following the interview. These variables are described in greater detail in Gupta and Beehr (1979).

Results

The results are presented in Tables 1 and 2. Supervisory status

Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here

interacted with the o anizations' managerial styles to determine perceptions of ambiguity and overload (Table 1). The attitudes and the other perception (underutilization) showed no interactions. Since the withdrawal behaviors of supervisors had little variance, these were not analyzed in 2x2 analyses of variance.

Investigation of the significant interactions showed the non-supervisors' perceptions were more negative (i.e., greater ambiguity and overload) than supervisors' perceptions in the hierarchical organization, but the opposite was true in the participative organization. The main effects revealed that

the employees in the participative organization fared "better" than in the traditional organization, i.e., less underutilization, less turnover intent, higher satisfaction, and higher involvement. The examination of main effects also showed that supervisors had less underutilization and higher involvement than the non-supervisors.

Finally, t-tests found that non-supervisors had higher rates of prior absenteeism, subsequent absenteeism, and voluntary turnover in the hierarchical than in the participative organization.

The results are consistent with the interpretation that management philosophy influences organizational members, especially among the rank-and-file employees. Because the data were non-experimental, however, they do not prove that one set of variables influences or causes another.

The results from the present study can be best summarized by the observation that work-related attitudes, behaviors and perceptions are more favorable among rank-and-file employees in the organization with the democratic, managerial style than among similar employees in the traditional, hierarchical organization. Among managers, the only significant difference was that less job ambiguity was perceived in the unionized than in the non-unionized organization. Thus, the results of the present study are consistent with the view that a democratic managerial philosophy makes the workplace attractive to rank-and-file employees, while simultaneously posing only minor inconveniences for managerial employees.

The significant interactions detected through the two-way analyses of variance illuminate this issue further. Two perceptions (job ambiguity and job overload), but none of the attitudes and behaviors, showed significant

interactions between supervisory status and managerial styles. Both these interactions were similar: perceptions of non-supervisors were more negative than were perceptions of supervisors in the traditional organization; the opposite was true in the democratic organization. Thus, it can be argued that, at least in terms of employee perceptions, the relative attractiveness of the job at different hierarchical levels is reversed by the managerial philosophy used in an organization (and consequently by the nature of the relationship between management and labor). The lower level employees reacted favorably to democracy; the higher level employees saw their jobs as more ambiguous and over-loaded. One interpretation of this is that it may require much more skill (or at least a different kind of skill) to supervise in a democratic organization than in an organization where management and labor have clear-cut relationships with each other and the domains of power and responsibility for each group are clearly specified.

Job ambiguity and job overload--the only variables for which the managerial style/supervisory status interactions were significant--have been related to job-related stress and strain in previous research (as noted by Beehr & Newman, 1978). It is appropriate to surmise, therefore, that traditional, hierarchical, unionized organizations may produce a more stressful work environment for rank-and-file employees and that non-unionized, democratic management may produce a more stressful work environment for managers. Since no measures of employee health were used in this study, however, these differential stress effects are presented here merely as conjecture.

Of course other explanations of these results are also possible. For example, it is possible that the specific locations of the two plants may

have created some community/cultural differences in attitudes that stimulated the differences in employee responses observed here. Although such explanations are possible, their applicability in the present content is limited for a variety of reasons. First, the demographic constitutions of the two samples was similar, thus reducing the viability of a cultural differences argument to understand the results. Second, the similarities in the size, technology, and physical working conditions in the two plants render these variables impotent in explaining the observed differences. Third, employees' and observers' reports validated the existence of differences in the levels of democracy and participation in the two organizations. Fourth, differences in employee responses were consistent across domains of employee responses. That is, there were significant differences across organizations in employee perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors. This consistency negates the likelihood of the differences being attributable to chance or artifactual factors. These arguments lead to the conclusion that the observed differences in employee responses are related to differences in managerial styles.

Such a conclusion, however, still leaves unresolved the issue of whether unionization, participation, or the productivity bonus (Scanlon) plan was the most salient influence on employee responses. The design of the present study obviously precludes an unambiguous determination of this issue. Even so, some logical inferences are possible. It is likely that managerial attitudes toward rank-and-file employees affect the way employees respond to their employers. It could even be argued that democratic managerial attitudes are more likely to lead to the adoption of profit-sharing plans for employees. Finally, a participative approach is likely to

reduce the possibility of unionization. In other words, participative management, profit-sharing, and non-unionization may in some cases represent a cluster of managerial philosophies--a syndrome that affects employee responses. Future research should attend to the possibility that such a syndrome of managerial philosophies exists, and attempt to disentangle the various elements of the syndrome.

In conclusion, the present study shows that the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of rank-and-file employees may be affected by managerial style when organizational structure and technology are relatively constant. The study shows further that managerial and non-managerial employees may be differentially influenced by traditional versus democratic organizational styles. Future research steps that follow logically from the results of this study include: (1) longitudinal investigations of the effects of particular managerial/organizational styles; (2) investigations including measures of employee health that test the stress hypotheses suggested here; (3) investigations of these effects across industry types that enable conclusions about the generalizability of the present findings; and (4) distinctions among the different elements of managerial philosophies.

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Footnote

A previous version of this study was reported at the meeting of the Midwest Psychological Association in Minneapolis, May 1982.

Table 1

Two-Way Analyses of Variance with Supervisory Status and Managerial Style as Indpendent Variables and Employee Attitudes and Perceptions as the Dependent Variables

	SS	DF	MS	F
Perceptions				
Job Ambiguity				
Supervisory Status (A)	.55	1	.55	1.40
Managerial Style (B)	.29	1	.29	.74
A X B	4.06	1	4.06	10.26**
Error	91.79	232	.40	
Job Overload				
Supervisory Status (A)	.72	1	.72	1.59
Managerial Style (B)	2.28	1	2.28	4.99*
A X B	2.16	1	2.16	4.72*
Error	105.89	232	.40	
Underutilization of Skills				
Supervisory Status (A)	26.93	1	26.93	7.11**
Managerial Style (B)	17.11	1	17.11	4.52*
A X B	4.04	1	4.04	1.07
Error	879.02	232	3.79	
Attitudes				
Job Statisfaction				
Supervisory Status (A)	2.05	1	2.05	1.92
Managerial Style (B)	7.72	1	7.72	7.23**
A X B	.10	1	.10	.09
Error	247.99	232	1.07	
Job Involvement				
Supervisory Status (A)	20.73	1	20.73	26.45**
Managerial Style (B)	12.21	1	12.21	15.58**
A X B	1.68	1	1.68	2.14
Error	181.80	232	.78	
Turnover Intent				
Supervisory Status (A)	2.26	1	2.26	1.51
Managerial Style (B)	16.44	1	16.44	11.07**
A X B	2.14	1	2.14	1.44
Error	344.55	232	1.49	

*p < .05
**p < .01

Table 2

Mean Differences in Withdrawal Behaviors Between Nonsupervisors in Hierarchical and Participative Plants

Withdrawal Behavior	Participative Plant		Hierarchical Plant		
	Mean	Variance	Mean	Variance	T
Prior Absenteeism	.45 (75)	.71	1.69 (105)	3.16	5.57**
Subsequent Absenteeism	.36 (55)	.66	1.09 (82)	.72	6.49**
Voluntary Turnover	1.09 (77)	.08	1.22 (54)	.18	2.12*

*p < .05
**p < .01